



Annual report to tenants and leaseholders 2010

Our vision is to provide
excellent housing management
services, with our residents at
the heart of everything we do



Brighton & Hove
City Council

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The sections in this annual report set out how we meet the standards set by the Tenant Services Authority for council and housing association landlords, any gaps and our improvement plans. They include feedback from tenants and leaseholders who gave us their views in questionnaires, exercises and one-off focus group meetings to talk about the TSA standards.

Facts and figures

At 31 March 2010 Brighton & Hove City Council owned and managed 12,302 rented homes across Brighton, Hove and Portslade, including 848 flats in 23 sheltered schemes. Another 2,235 flats in our blocks were owned by leaseholders.

The Housing Management division employs 229 members of staff across the city.

Welcome

Maria Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing

I'm pleased to report that we achieved some big improvements to our services in 2009/10, working in partnership with tenants and leaseholders

Welcome to this annual report setting out our performance as a landlord in the year ending 31 March 2010 and our commitments to council tenants and leaseholders for this current year.



Residents have a very powerful influence at Brighton & Hove City Council. In this report council tenants and leaseholders show how closely residents are involved in shaping our housing policies and priorities and the ways we provide landlord services, and in checking on our performance.

I'm pleased to report that we achieved some big improvements to our services in 2009/10 and better value for money, working together with tenants and leaseholders. For example, the new repairs partnership we have developed with residents will help us to bring every tenant's home up to the Decent Homes Standard and provide a better service to all of you. And the new ways of working with residents to improve life on estates that we have been trying out in the Turning the Tide pilot in East Brighton have been so successful that we expect to extend them across the city.

We still have room for improvement, however. This report reflects the feedback we've had from tenants and leaseholders on how you think we perform and where we need to improve. It sets out how we intend to work with you to provide excellent housing management services, with our residents at the heart of everything we do.

I would like to thank all our tenant and resident representatives, members of the Housing Management Consultative Committee and staff who have worked very hard in the last year to bring about real improvements in our housing service. By working closely together, we are making steady progress towards achieving excellence in all our housing services and making the improvements we set out in our **Service Improvement Plan 2009-12**.

I would also like to thank the council tenant representatives and other board members of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes, the housing company set up by the council to raise investment for improvements to council tenants' homes. They have been working hard to get our 'Local Delivery Vehicle' project up and running and we hope that will be achieved in this financial year.

Maria Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing

How tenants and leaseholders have been involved in producing and checking this annual report

This is your annual report and we have tried to involve as many tenants and leaseholders as we could in reporting how we perform as a landlord and what we need and intend to do to improve. We set out to produce an informative, honest and accurate annual report – a true picture of our strengths and weaknesses and what tenants and leaseholders think of us, in their own words.

We agreed a plan and timetable for involving tenants and leaseholders in producing and checking this annual report with resident representatives on the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group, at the City Assembly, the four Area Housing Management Panels and the Housing Management Consultative Committee.

Representatives from our many residents' associations and working groups explain in the report what they have achieved in 2009/10. We also include the views and comments of tenants and leaseholders who helped us assess how we meet the new standards for social housing landlords set by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). Their feedback indicates we need to make some improvements to fully meet all the TSA standards. We will work with residents to do this. We have outlined in the report how we meet the standards, any gaps and what we plan to do by 31 March 2011 to improve our services to you.

Throughout July we consulted all resident associations and groups on a draft of the full annual report. We also put it on our website for comment, emailed residents on our resident involvement database for their views and made copies available at our housing offices. We tried to reach tenants who are under-represented in our existing resident groups, such as younger residents, through Facebook. Around 100 comments on the draft report were gratefully received from residents and helped us shape the final report, which [was] agreed by the Housing Management Consultative Committee including tenant and leaseholder representatives.

“There will always be shortcomings and failings, but I am impressed by determination to improve as shown in draft annual report.”

Resident comment on the consultation draft report

Tenant and leaseholder representatives told us that the annual report should not be too long, so we also produced a short, summary version of this report which has been sent to all tenants and leaseholders with September's Homing In magazine. This longer report is being sent to resident representatives and the TSA and can be sent to any tenants and leaseholders who ask for it. Both reports are also available on the council's website and at our housing offices.

Nick Hibberd, Assistant Director Housing Management

You can get a copy of any documents in **bold** type in this report from our website or our housing offices. Contact details are on the back cover of this report. You can also contact your housing office if you want more information.

Housing Management Consultative Committee

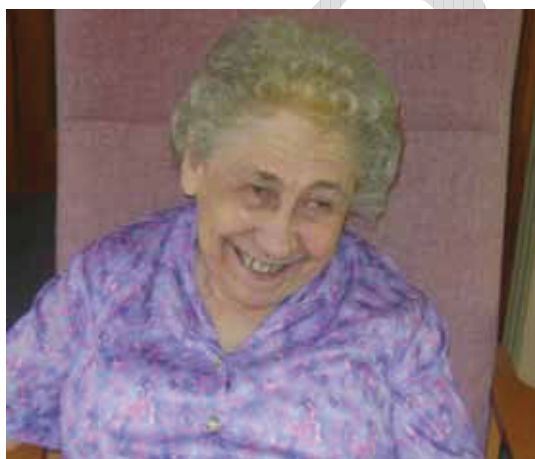
(Photo to come of HMCC meeting scrutinising draft annual report 1 September 2010)

Under the council's constitution, the Cabinet Member for Housing or the Cabinet make key decisions about the council's housing services.

The Housing Management Consultative Committee (HMCC) discusses reports about how the council's homes are managed and advises the Cabinet Member for Housing and Cabinet whether to approve the recommendations. The committee and resident representatives also advise the Cabinet Member for Housing on tenant consultation and make recommendations about the outcome of consultations with tenants and leaseholders.

Tenant and leaseholder representatives at HMCC are involved and empowered in various ways including:

- being consulted on all key decisions about Housing Management before they are taken, including decisions on strategic priorities, changes to housing-related policies and the ways we provide housing services
- presenting to the committee the outcomes and updates on the work of residents' working groups, such as the Tenancy Agreement Chairman's Focus Group
- setting our annual budget and spending priorities, and
- monitoring performance through regular progress reports and performance reports every three months on how well we are doing against a range of performance indicators covering all major aspects of the service.



“The Housing Management Consultative Committee makes the council officers and managers account for their performance”

Beryl Snelling, HMCC tenant representative

You are welcome to attend all Housing Management Consultative Committee and Housing Cabinet Member meetings. Dates are advertised in the Homing In newsletter and you can submit public questions. Call 01273 291058 for more information.

You can also see meeting dates, reports and decisions at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk

Resident Involvement & Empowerment

Photo of HMCC signing off report 1 Sep (to follow)

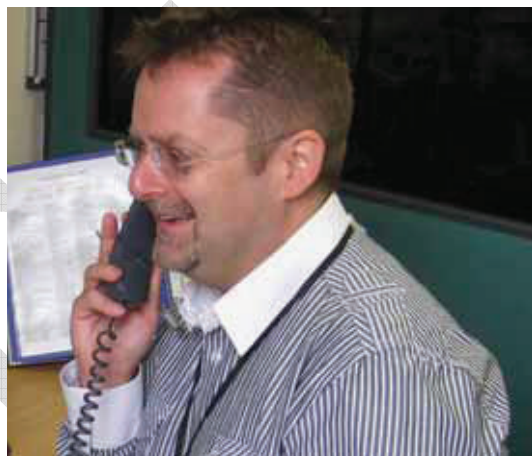
With tenants' and leaseholders' involvement, we will learn from what you tell us and provide excellent customer service that meets your needs. We will agree our aims and targets with residents and report our performance so you can hold us to account and check that we meet our commitments

1. Customer service, choice and complaints

We will improve customer service by making it easier and quicker for you to get things done, in a way that suits your needs

Customer service

We train all Housing Management staff in customer service, communication and equalities and each office has a 'customer service champion'.



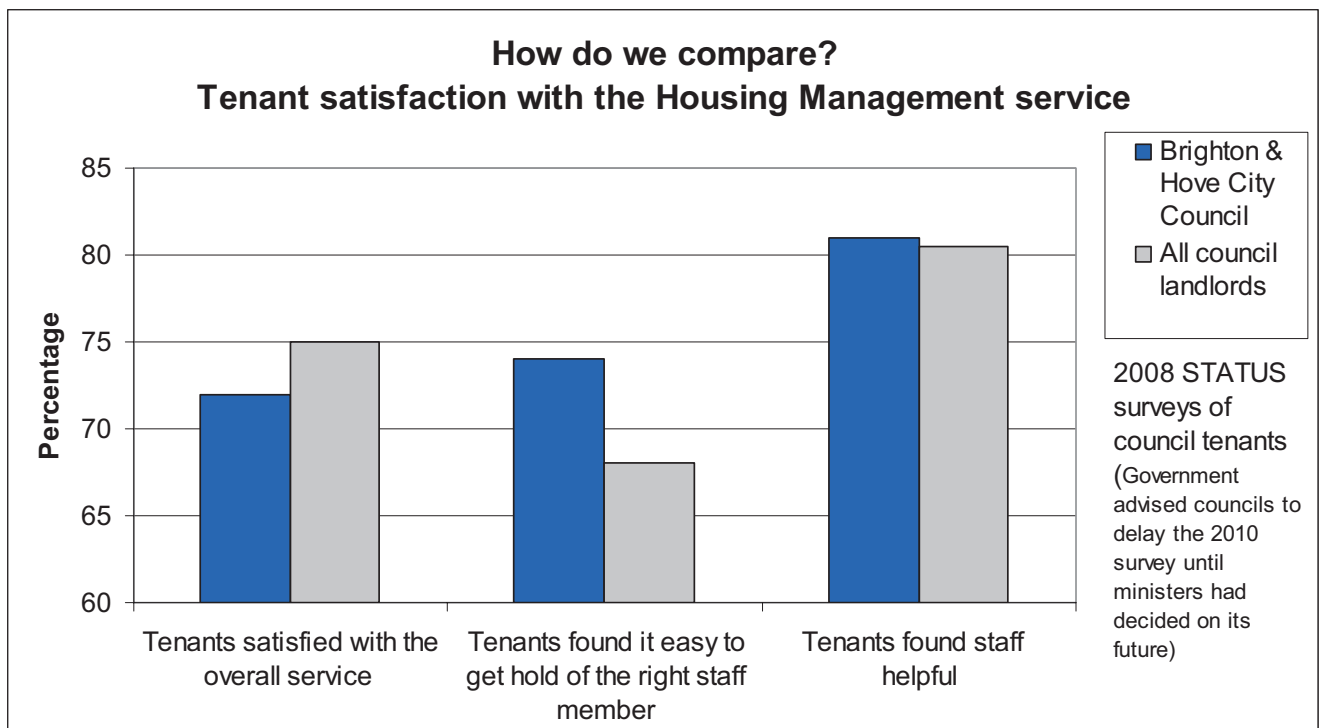
There are various ways you can contact us:

- visiting, phoning or writing to us at one of five local housing offices where there are also free phones to other services, cash desks for rent payments and internet access for interactive services. Most people contact us by phone
- e-mailing individual officer or teams or council.housing@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- reporting repairs and checking progress 24 hours a day, seven days a week through our repairs contact centre
- visiting our website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing which had 26,000 hits in 2009. It has a range of information and you can pay rent on-line. We also use it to get customer feedback from surveys and included a website survey in January 2010.

Housing office contact details and opening times are at the back of this document

Staff also provide home visits to residents who can't come to our offices and regularly attend and support residents meetings outside office hours.

In Whitehawk, a resident-led project set up a local base for Mears, the police and local residents. It was shortlisted for the Customer Service category of the national Housing Excellence Awards this year.



We also regularly ask tenants and leaseholders how satisfied they are with different parts of our service.

Customer satisfaction with sheltered housing

In 2009 we started using customer satisfaction surveys at sheltered schemes, on our sheltered services web pages, with randomly selected tenants and with all new tenants. We updated this survey in February 2010 to ask residents how satisfied they were with our sheltered service overall.

93% of the 39 sheltered tenants who completed a survey in February-March 2010 were very satisfied (57%) or satisfied (36%) with our sheltered service overall. No-one was dissatisfied.

As a result of tenants' feedback we have:

- emphasised customer service satisfaction in our current CareLink Plus contract (out of hours service) and set up a liaison group with residents to deal with any concerns
- worked with tenants to revise the aims and objectives of the service
- worked with the Community Payback Team to revamp scheme gardens.

“I have now been here for three months and can say I am very happy with all aspects of living here.”

New tenant at a sheltered scheme, February 2010



“The payback team were courteous and considerate to tenants, they worked hard and we were pleasantly surprised by what they achieved.”

Charles Penrose, Sloane Court Tenants Association

Leaseholders’ satisfaction with our leasehold management service

72% of leaseholders who answered a survey in 2010 were satisfied with the council as their leasehold manager, compared to 68% in 2007.

We have **customer charters** on different areas of our services, setting out our customer service standards. We will involve residents in reviewing these charters this year in developing ‘local offers’ for services to you.

‘Participants are unclear about what is meant by services and what standards to expect.’

Report of independent focus groups of tenants on meeting the TSA standards, July 2010

Resident volunteers have been trained as ‘mystery shoppers’ to test our customer service at housing offices and the Repairs Desk. They found most staff were friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and polite. The few staff who did not meet the standard were supported and coached to improve their customer service skills.

“Mystery shopping helps ensure the standard of customer service within Housing Management remains constantly high.” Resident mystery shopper

‘Committed staff who demonstrate a professional and caring approach towards customers. Sign up/settling in visit encourages involvement. Informative website - rents payable on line. Effective use made of newsletters. Information about rents is comprehensive - easy to understand. Helpful advice leaflets. Home visits and office interviews provided with five days of request.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

We provide our tenants with a wide range of information about the services they receive, including a welcome pack for new tenants, a **Tenant Handbook**, quarterly rent statements, **information leaflets** and the **customer charters**. All of our information can be provided in different formats – large type, audio tapes or CDs, Braille, electronically - or translated into other languages where needed.

71% of tenants surveyed in 2008 thought Brighton & Hove City Council was good at keeping them informed about things that might affect them as a tenant, compared to 74% of council tenants nationally. STATUS survey 2008

Our quarterly resident newsletter **Homing In**, which has a tenant editorial board, informs and consults all tenants and leaseholders about our services and proposed changes.



“I’m very glad to work on Homing In as it provides a valuable source of information for all residents.”

Su Hansen, Homing In Tenant Editorial Board

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views felt the council fully or partly provides information which meets tenants’ needs and communicates with residents appropriately.

“Email/internet access is a godsend for those, like me, who have hearing problems.”

“Information also available (on request) in other languages.”

One person suggested that the council should: **“Ask tenants to feed back on every communication”**

“Homing In does help you and gives you information.”

But tenants in the TSA standards focus groups wanted a more honest view of what’s going on: **“Homing In only tells you the good things that are happening.”**

Many would like to receive updated information on the website or by email.

To improve our customer service to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Work with resident groups to consider more effective ways for you to contact us or access the services you need. We aim to make it easier and quicker for you to get things done in a way, and at a time, that suits you
- Carry out a service improvement programme for sheltered housing agreed with residents and deliver a revised out of hours service for the sheltered service
- Work with residents to review all customer charters and replace them with ‘local offers’ by 1 April 2011 (see below)
- Continue to improve customer service skills of front line staff through training and coaching
- Increase the ways that we ask you to tell us what you think of our services, for example by telephone, events and regular mystery shopping exercises. We will report the results back to you and how we use them to make improvements to our services
- Improve our communication with you by involving residents in developing our publications, letters and forms, putting more useful information on our website and looking at other ways to communicate with you.

Choice

We will continue to look for ways to give you more choice

Residents control an annual £540,000 Estate Development Budget (EDB) for improvements to communal areas around their homes and suggest and vote on improvements to be carried out each year. Our new repairs partner, Mears, has committed to make the budget go even further by providing extra free labour.



“The EDB money spent on fencing and bin sheds has really improved the appearance of estates.”

Mick Tompkins, Whitehawk South Central Residents Association

We have tried to increase the amount of choice tenants have within our services. For example, residents have a choice of appointment time for repairs and gas servicing to be carried out, now including evenings and Saturday mornings.

Tenants have a choice of finishes, colours and design when their kitchen is replaced. We also provide a choice of styles and colours for replacement doors and windows and for communal decorations.

Tenants and leaseholders are involved at all stages of choosing new contractors, such as for the new repairs partnership, laundry contract and car clamping contract in 2009/10.



“The Car Parks and Garages Working Group selected the best clamping contract, giving residents what we wanted. We also developed the standards and interview questions for evaluating the tenders.”

Muriel Briault, Car Parks & Garages Working Group

Tenants have a wide choice of ways to pay rent. You can pay at paypoint outlets, post offices and housing offices using an account payment card, by direct debit or standing order, or over the internet or by phone with a debit card.

The council operates a choice based lettings system for allocating council homes to new tenants and existing tenants seeking a transfer. This is currently under review by a focus group of tenants. If tenants wish to move home we can advise about alternative housing options to give greater choice and opportunity to move.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views said the council partly provides choices which meet tenants' needs. However, a few weren't convinced:

“They like to appear to give you choice and affect decisions. I'm not sure if they really do.”

We are increasing the range of ways residents can choose to have a say in how their homes and neighbourhoods are managed in developing a new **tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy** with residents.

To improve the choices available to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Complete all programmed EDB works agreed for this year
- Work with residents to develop a menu of options for residents to choose together the grounds maintenance services they want for their estate and would pay for in their service charges, through the Grounds Maintenance review
- Find out about the sort of choices residents would like as part of our work to develop 'local offers' with you (see below)
- Develop a new Home Ownership Strategy to support tenants wishing to take on full or part home ownership and bring about improvements in leasehold management.

Complaints

We know we need to listen and learn from your complaints and will work with residents to make improvements

The council's **complaints procedure** is advertised in a leaflet, our **tenant handbook** and on our website. You can complain in a variety of ways including in person, on the telephone, by e-mail, on line through our website or by letter. We accept complaints made by people on your behalf as long as you give permission.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views were divided on how clear and easy it is to make a complaint about our housing services, and whether we resolve complaints promptly, politely and fairly.

“Making a complaint is relatively easy - the action taken to resolve problems is relatively non-existent”

“I have had cause to make a complaint once and found the response quick and efficient and the problem was eventually solved, although it took a complaint to solve it, rather than a simple request for a repair.”

“Complaints is brilliant, they are really happy when they talk to you. You can't really get annoyed by them. They are too nice! It's done pretty quick.”

One person suggested that the council needs: **“an internal and proactive trouble-**

shooter.”

Tenants in the TSA focus groups agreed it is clear and easy to make a complaint. However, they felt that due to the overwork of housing officers and cumbersome procedures, complaints are not resolved quickly.

Our performance in dealing with complaints in 2009/10			
Complaints about	Number of complaints we received	Average time we took to reply to complaints, against our target of 10 working days	Percentage of replies we completed within our target of 10 working days
Housing management	140	8 ½ days	73%
Repairs and maintenance	178	11 days	63%
Total	318	10 days Overall we met our target of replying within an average of 10 working days	68% Overall we just missed our target of replying to 70% of complaints within 10 working days

In 2009/10 five cases were referred to the Local Government Ombudsman - the independent organisation you can approach if you have been through our formal complaints process but are not satisfied. The results were:

- in two cases the Ombudsman found there was no maladministration by the council
- one case was withdrawn by the person who made the complaint
- in two cases the Ombudsman was satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 of the council's complaints procedure.

We aim to improve our complaints performance in 2010/11. Our targets for 2010/11 are to respond to 80% of complaints within 10 working days and to have an average complaint reply time of nine working days.

How we've acted and learnt from your complaints:

- We reviewed bereavement procedures and trained staff to provide a more sensitive approach after a tenant has died.
- We had many complaints that it was not clear who could succeed to a tenancy. We produced a clear leaflet and ensured all front line staff are fully trained in this complex area.
- We reviewed and updated our tenancy agreement with a residents' focus group to make it easier to understand.
- We reviewed and re-launched our recharge process and trained staff to ensure it is applied fairly and consistently.
- We introduced uniforms for Community Wardens so you easily spot them.

In 2009/10 we dealt with 59 Stage 1 leaseholder disputes, 15 at Stage 2 and four went to Stage 3. The council's record on resolving complaints over the last five years is 82% resolved at Stage 1 and 65% at Stage 2, with 94% resolved at either Stage 1 or 2.

We monitor customer complaints, suggestions and compliments and are committed to learning from what residents tell us and putting things right where changes are needed.

To improve the way we deal with complaints, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Set up and work with a group of residents to review and simplify our procedures on complaints to make sure we manage and resolve complaints promptly, politely and fairly
- Agree suitable remedies with residents where we have got something wrong
- Report complaints performance and compliments to Housing Management Consultative Committee
- Report our complaints performance and the outcome of complaints annually to all tenants and leaseholders.

DRAFT

2. Involvement and empowerment

We are building on our strong resident involvement structure to offer a wider range of opportunities for all tenants and leaseholders to have a say in how their home and neighbourhood are managed, in ways that suit them

Offering all tenants a wide range of opportunities to be involved

There are some 70 tenant and resident associations, which are open to any resident living in the area or block. They aim to represent the views of the residents and can also raise issues affecting you and your neighbourhood on your behalf. Tenant and resident associations elect representatives to Area Housing Management Panels and can bid for improvement works to their estate or block through the Estate Development Budget.

Residents' associations meet together and debate issues of interest to council tenants and leaseholders across the city twice a year at the City Assembly. Individual tenants and leaseholders are also welcome to attend.



“It’s important that representatives from residents’ groups city wide meet together and discuss the important issues”

Chris Kift, Chair of City Assembly

54% of Brighton & Hove City Council tenants surveyed in 2008 were satisfied their landlord took tenants' views into account, compared to 56% of council tenants nationally
STATUS surveys of tenants 2008

‘Resident involvement is well resourced and supported. Relationships between tenants and councillors are mature and productive. Residents consulted on wide range of issues. Short term tenants’ focus groups are a useful way of engaging on policy issues. Tenants are an integral part of planning processes. Residents play an active role in performance monitoring. Annual feedback provided on resident involvement impact.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

Residents’ Area Panels in each of the four Housing Management neighbourhoods discuss housing management performance in their area, are consulted about new policies and projects, run their annual Estate Development Budget for environmental improvements and can require reports from staff. They met four times in 2009/10.

Area Panels elect tenant representatives to the Housing Management Consultative Committee (HMCC), Tenant Compact Monitoring Group, Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group, Housing Income Management Monitoring Group, Car Parks & Garages Monitoring Group, Estates Service Monitoring Group, Homing In Tenants' Editorial Board and Tenant Disability Network.

There are also citywide special interest groups of residents - the Sheltered Housing Action Group, High Rise Action Group and Leaseholders Action Group; a residents' Asset Management Panel; and resident led Chairman's focus groups, for example on the new **tenancy agreement** and **tenant handbook**, and a laundry facilities working group. These focus groups are time limited and finish when their task is completed. Details of what the resident groups do are set out in the draft **tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy**.

The Sheltered Housing Action Group successfully campaigned to change back to the traditional model of on-site scheme managers. Tenants were trained and involved in recruiting new staff.



“We congratulate the council on their agreement to retain scheme managers of sheltered housing onsite at their scheme in response to SHAG’s tenant petition. This is now being carefully developed.”

Tom Whiting, Sheltered Housing Action Group

We have well established partnership working with tenants and leaseholders, through this strong structure of residents' associations and groups. They have a key role in influencing our strategic priorities, developing policy and shaping the way we provide our services. They also scrutinise our performance and set performance targets for us to meet. Resident representatives at the HMCC scrutinise a **quarterly report on our performance** and how we compare to similar and the best performing social landlords in 'benchmarking' groups.

We have started working with tenant associations that are interested in becoming a Tenant Management Organisation (TMO), taking on responsibility for some of the services that the council currently provides, such as cleaning and grounds maintenance.

“We are working to achieve our aims of becoming a Tenant Management Organisation.” Maggie King, St James' House Community Alliance

2,400 tenants responded to our consultation on the new tenancy agreement. We used this feedback to make changes before the final agreement was approved.

The **Tenant Compact**, agreed with residents, sets out how residents are involved in strategic and local housing decisions, the standards that have been agreed for involvement of tenants and leaseholders, meetings, information and resident groups. This is now being reviewed with the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group of residents elected by their Area Panel.

“Participation creaks, but it works!” John Melson, High Rise Action Group

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views thought that the council definitely or partly offers a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the management of their housing. Resident representatives made some positive comments: **“Too many opportunities, not enough hours in the day!”**

But some views were mixed: **“The council focus groups have really worked well and are making ground. Generally though the council listens but doesn't always act.”**

“Some things you do feel involved in, like the tenancy agreement. They did take on-board suggestions. In other things, when they know they don't have much choice or funds, they don't.”

Some tenants in the TSA standards focus groups pointed to a need for more opportunities to get involved outside of the structure of residents' associations:

“Only on tenants associations and all of us don't want to be on one and certain people are on everything.”

“Residents' associations do have their place but bring in more residents so it's less exclusive.”

We have been working with the residents' Tenant Compact Monitoring Group to increase and strengthen resident involvement by increasing the range of opportunities for tenants and leaseholders to get involved. Over 2,000 residents returned the **Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire** sent with our Homing In newsletter in December 2009. Although nine out of 10 were not active members of a tenant and resident association, two thirds said they want to be more involved in decisions that affect them as tenants or leaseholders. Also, three quarters want to be more involved in decisions that affect their local area.

We now have a database of over 1,800 tenants and leaseholders who are interested in getting more involved in the management of their homes and neighbourhoods in a variety of ways, such as phone surveys. Involving a wider pool of people will help us arrange our services to reflect residents' needs and wishes. As an example, we used this database to invite interested tenants to the focus groups to discuss how we meet TSA standards.

“Most participants agreed that these focus groups which have involved a wider selection of tenants are a good idea. They would like more of them: “You should have more of these, not with the tenants associations. More of these focus groups.”

Report of independent focus groups of tenants on meeting the TSA standards, July 2010

If you would like to be more involved and did not complete our tenant and leaseholder involvement questionnaire, please contact your housing office.

With the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group we have produced and consulted on a draft **Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy**. This explains our resident involvement structure and sets out a clear menu of different ways for tenants and leaseholders to engage with the council in having a say in how their home and neighbourhood is managed, including informal ways.

The residents' Tenant Compact Monitoring Group told us excellent communication, more information and training were their top priorities to improve resident involvement. So we highlighted those things in the draft **Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy**.

Resident involvement workshop February 2010



“The Tenant Compact Monitoring Group want more residents to be involved and are waiting for your views”

Stewart Gover, Tenant Compact Monitoring Group

To increase the range of opportunities for you to be involved, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Develop ways for all tenants and leaseholders to have the chance to be involved in decisions about their home and services and our plans for the future
- Use the tenant and leaseholder involvement database to involve residents on the issues they are interested in and in a way that suits them
- Using feedback from the consultation, finalise the **Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy** working with a wide range of residents
- With the residents' Tenant Compact Monitoring Group review the **Tenant Compact** and consult you on the outcome
- Report back to you at regular intervals so you can check how effective our resident involvement policies are
- Promote resident involvement as an important part of Housing Management officers' work
- Monitor the profile of involved residents and develop ways to encourage residents from under-represented groups to get involved.

Consulting tenants and acting reasonably in providing opportunities to agree 'local offers' for service delivery

As well as meeting the TSA's own standards, the TSA requires landlords to agree local standards with tenants which reflect their local priorities. It calls these 'local offers'. We already have some locally agreed service offers and standards, for example:

- local residents set the services and performance standards provided at the 'Our neighbourhood' local base in Whitehawk. This resident led partnership of local residents, the police and our repairs partner Mears provides a more customer focused and responsive service. Repairs are done quickly, crime and anti-social behaviour are tackled, the estates are managed more effectively and more residents are involved

- a new Housing and Estates Forum in Moulsecoomb, set up under the 'Turning the Tide' pilot to tackle social exclusion and anti-social behaviour, aims to increase resident involvement, meet residents' local priorities and improve services to what they want. Residents can set local standards and be involved in monitoring performance against them and give feedback to the council and other partners.



“The Housing and Estates Forum will transform the way communities are inspected. Residents, councillors and housing officers all inspect areas together and work in unison to make cleaner, safer neighbourhoods.”

Dave Murtagh, East Moulsecoomb
Tenant and Resident Association

We agreed a plan and timetable for involving tenants and leaseholders in developing 'local offers with tenant and leaseholder representatives on the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group, at the City Assembly, the four Area Housing Management Panels and the Housing Management Consultative Committee in June 2010. The draft **Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy** also aims to develop a framework for agreeing local offers and priorities for our residents.

To agree 'local offers' with you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Consult as many tenants and leaseholders as we can to find out your priorities for our services. We will use our resident involvement database, community events and a variety of ways to get the views of all sections of the community
- Use the results of that consultation to develop service pledges for all aspects of our landlord service with our resident working groups. These will set out the standards of housing services that residents can expect. They will include how performance will be monitored, reported to and scrutinised by residents and what we will do if we fail to meet those pledges
- Consult again with residents on the draft service pledges, then put them to the Housing Management Consultative Committee for scrutiny and comment before they go to the Cabinet Member for Housing for approval
- Agree arrangements with residents for reviewing the local offers from time to time.

Service pledges will cover repairs and maintenance, tenancy management, estates service, resident involvement, anti-social behaviour, car parks and garages, leasehold management, income management, lettings and sheltered housing.

Providing a range of opportunities to influence how we meet all the TSA's standards, scrutinise performance against the standards and in the development of the annual report

We told residents about the TSA's proposed and final standards through *Homing In* newsletters, our website, reports to HMCC and presentations at Area Panels. We also sent all associations a copy of the TSA's guide to the standards and made copies available at our housing offices.

You can get a copy of the TSA's guide 'What does the regulatory framework mean for you? A guide to social housing standards' from the TSA's website at www.tenantservicesauthority.org or call the TSA on 0845 230 7000, contact us on 01273 290591 or pick one up at your housing office.

We invited all residents to send us their comments on how we meet the standards in *Homing In*. We asked resident representatives how they thought we meet some of the TSA standards at the City Assembly and Area Panels in May and in questionnaires sent to all residents' associations and groups. Other tenants and leaseholders gave us their views through a questionnaire available at our offices and on the consultation web portal on our website. We emailed a link to the questionnaire to all tenants and leaseholders on our resident involvement database who provided an email address. We received up to 36 responses for each of the 17 questions we asked in total.

We also gave an opportunity for tenants not currently actively involved in our formal resident involvement structure to discuss in detail how we meet the TSA standards in focus group meetings with an independent facilitator. They had all told us in the tenant and leaseholder involvement survey in December that they would like to get more involved. Sixteen tenants attended from across the city, with a range of ages and interests and having lived in our homes from three to twenty six years. A quarter of them were from Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, who are under-represented amongst our tenant and leaseholder representatives.

To provide a range of opportunities for you to influence how we meet all the TSA's standards, scrutinise our performance against the standards and develop the next annual report, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Continue to involve residents and resident groups in assessing how we perform against the TSA standards and proposing any changes to how we meet them
- Tell you the results of consultations about how we meet the TSA's standards
- Have regular 'You said, we did' feedback in **Homing In** magazine, letting you know how we take your views into account and highlighting examples where this has influenced the service
- Develop a new performance report with residents to ensure we are reporting on the issues that are most important to you and that the information is presented in a clear and easily understandable way. We will aim to include, where possible, residents' assessment of quality
- Publicise performance information in housing offices as well as in **Homing In** and on our website
- Agree with residents a plan for involving you in producing and checking the next annual report.

Providing support to tenants to build their capacity to be more effectively involved

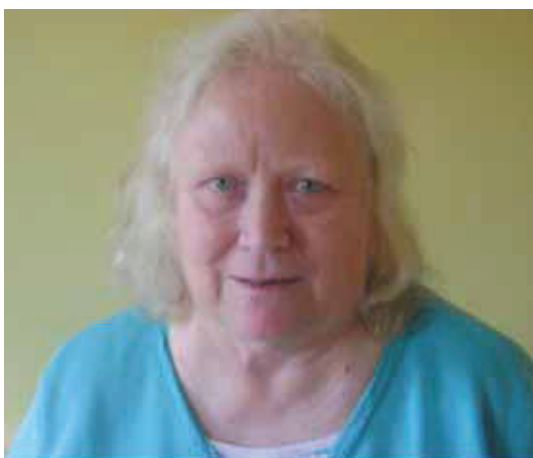
Four Community Participation Officers, a Community Participation Assistant and a manager provide support to the tenant and resident associations and other resident groups, together with other Housing Management staff.



“We offer support and advice, and encourage all residents to get involved.”

Peter Mustow, Community Participation Officer

The council grant funds the Resource Centre, which provides a range of training and support to residents and tenant and resident associations, such as in setting up accounts, running a group, working in a committee and producing a newsletter. Resident representatives also attend Chartered Institute of Housing conferences and other relevant events to build their knowledge and skills.



“The Resource Centre is a really helpful organisation for tenant reps. We’d be lost without them.”

Jean Davis, Leach Court Tenants Association

‘There are many examples of the council, residents and partners working to build community capital and cohesion. Effective use is made of the independent resource centre - builds capacity.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

We also support residents to get involved by providing hearing loops, interpreters etc. and covering child care and travel costs. All resident meeting rooms comply with the Disability Discrimination Act and are accessible.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

The largest group of residents who gave us their views agreed that the council provides support to help residents be effectively involved:

“Have been doing it through home visits, workshops/ training courses.”

“Very happy with involvement of housing office, estate warden and community development team in helping local community association.”

To offer you more support to build your capacity to be more effectively involved, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Improve the training and development programme for residents who want to become involved by continuing to use the Resource Centre and providing coaching and support by the Community Participation Officers
- Develop training for residents in monitoring and scrutinising our performance
- Offer more ‘Rate your Estate’ training for tenants and leaseholders who want to be resident assessors as this is introduced in other areas of the city
- Provide training in energy efficiency advice to interested residents
- Offer training in being a company director and charity trustee to any tenants appointed by Area Panels in February 2011 to be new tenant board members of the Local Delivery Vehicle, Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes.

3. Understanding and responding to the diverse needs of tenants

We are committed to equal opportunities and valuing diversity. We will continue to build up a better understanding of our residents' needs and tailor our services to meet them.

We do all we can to make sure our services are open, welcoming and easy to use for people of every age, religion or faith, gender including transgender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, and people with disabilities or care and support needs. We achieve this by having, for example:

- an equalities and inclusion policy and staff training that helps officers respond well to a variety of individual needs, and treat people fairly and with respect
- accessible offices that meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, and offering home visits
- hearing loops in interview rooms, reception and cashiers counters, and big button phones, textphone and a computer for public use on request
- accessibility and translation features on our website
- information about residents that help us tailor service – eg when we consulted with all residents on our **tenancy agreement** last year, we were able to send information in the formats we already knew individual tenants preferred
- an ongoing programme of equality impact assessments for all our services, with actions to make sure our services do not negatively impact on groups of people or individuals
- a Tenancy Sustainment Team that works with tenants with specific care and support needs, and refers them to other council or city services as appropriate
- work on a variety of service issues with resident groups – for example with the Tenant Disability Network on improvement works to make sure all our resident meeting rooms are fully accessible.



“The Tenant Disability Network works on behalf of all residents with disability to advocate and help purchase appropriate equipment.”

Barry Kent, Tenant Disability Network

A tenant with a blind daughter complained her garden was not safe place for her. So we found council and charity funding for a garden make over. Now her daughter can play outside safely.

We also:

- remove racist or hate graffiti within 24 hours
- arrange support for victims of hate crime and domestic violence
- give priority and reduce parking charges to blue disability badge holders for a garage or car parking space
- are achieving and working towards excellence in the national Equality Framework for Local Government
- comply with the CRE (now Commission for Equality and Human Rights) code of practice for racial equality in housing
- are working to carry out relevant actions in the council's Housing Strategies for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender, Black and Minority Ethnic and Older People.

The council was the top local authority in Stonewall's annual workplace equality index for its employment practices and general policies ensuring fair treatment of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

Residents of sheltered housing have a personalised support plan and we are the only sheltered provider in the city to use the Single Assessment Process when assessing their needs. This makes it easier to share care and support information with other professionals. We checked a sample of our support plans through Supporting People and it showed that on average 90% of the identified needs were met. 85% of sheltered tenants who completed our survey in February – March 2010 told us they were very satisfied or satisfied with how we planned support to meet their needs.

In October 2009 all sheltered scheme managers signed up as 'Dignity Champions' to support the Dignity in Care campaign to improve the respect and care for older people.

Resident meeting rooms are used to support wider community activities, for example the Asian Women's Group is based in one and the Gay Elderly Men's Society held their 2009 Christmas party in a sheltered scheme.

76% of tenants from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups have indicated they are satisfied with arrangements for resident participation. However, a survey of resident representatives in 2009 showed that BME and younger residents are under-represented. We have made particular efforts to encourage young tenants to get involved in the Whitehawk local base and through community events, and have actions in our **Tenant and leaseholder involvement strategy** to increase involvement generally, and of groups that are currently under-represented.

The Tenancy Sustainment Team works with tenants with complex support needs, co-ordinating services from professionals such as social workers and health specialists. It works as part of the council's 'Turning the Tide' strategy for tackling inequality and social exclusion in social housing, and also works with the police to reduce anti-social behaviour.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views generally agreed that the council treats all residents with fairness and respect: **"As part of a minority group myself, I have always been**

treated respectfully, but this should be expected.”

Most felt that we fully or partly demonstrate that we understand the different needs of our tenants: **“It always seems to”**.

But one commented that the council: **“Should listen more”**.

Generally, tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council tries to be fair. Some felt it tried too hard and could be tougher on certain tenants. Others felt that it only listened to the loudest.

To improve how we understand and respond to residents’ diverse needs, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Continue to add to the information we hold on our residents and their needs and to check it is up to date. We will use it to continuously improve how we communicate with and provide services to people or groups with specific needs
- Use a variety of methods to try to involve harder to reach groups of residents in all aspects of our service
- Update the procedure for dealing with racist and religiously motivated hate crime in line with the arrangements across Sussex
- Review our procedures for dealing with domestic violence.

To help us provide services that meet your needs, make sure we know about them. For example, let your local housing office know if you have health problems or need us to contact you or send you information in a different way.

Home

1. Quality of accommodation

The value for money, new repairs partnership with Mears will help us bring all tenants' homes up to Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013

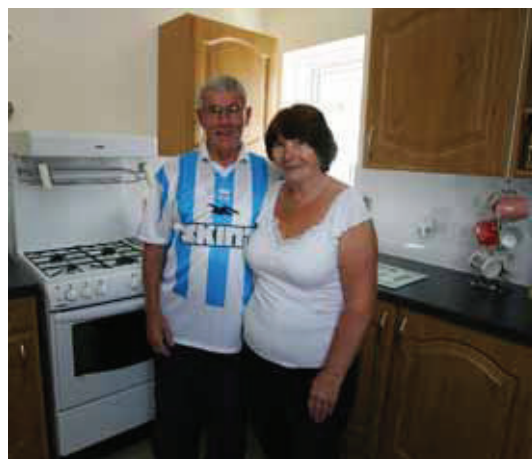
Following tenants' vote against transfer of their homes to a new housing association in 2007, the council was millions of pounds short of the money needed to bring all homes up to the government's Decent Homes Standard by the end of December 2010. The TSA may agree an extension to the 31 December 2010 deadline where this is reasonable.

Bringing all tenants' homes up to standard has been our main priority. In 2009/10 we increased investment in Decent Homes improvements by making savings in other areas of work. By 31 March 2010, 60.5% of tenants' homes met the Decent Homes Standard.

We installed 581 new kitchens, 525 new bathrooms, 2,300 new doors and 1,051 new boilers in 2009/10.

In 2009/10 we also started a programme of works to sheltered schemes with shared bathroom facilities, to provide tenants with self contained homes with their own shower.

Since 2008, when resident representatives supported our work, we have worked with them and the residents' Asset Management Panel to set up a new 10 year Repairs & Improvement Partnership. The panel was set up to represent the profile of our residents, after inviting every tenant and leaseholder forward to take part. Residents from the panel were fully involved in the selection of contractor and setting up the partnership with Mears which



“The Asset Management Panel was set a task of finding the best repairs contractor, and after much work and deliberation we agreed that Mears was the best.”

Ted Harman, residents' Asset Management Panel

Our new Repairs & Improvement Partnership with Mears will give big cost savings that will help us bring all tenants' homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013.

A review of our new repairs contract in June 2010 by the government's watchdog, the Audit Commission, indicated that the council is now doing everything possible to bridge the funding gap and bring all tenants' homes up to Decent Homes Standard. Two internal audits also approved the procurement and mobilisation of the contract.

'There is a clear commitment to, and focus on, robust management and monitoring of the new repairs and maintenance contract to achieve the DHS target by 2013.'

'The consultation carried out on the LDV and new repairs and maintenance contract is good, and residents have been fully involved in procuring and setting up the new repairs and maintenance contract.'

Draft report of the Audit Commission Review of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Contract,
July 2010

After a series of meetings with residents and on the recommendation of the HMCC, in February 2010 the council agreed a £76 million **three year investment plan** to bring all tenants' homes up to the Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013, subject to funding.

You can see what improvements are planned for your area or sheltered housing from 2010-2013 on our website at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/hm-investment-programme and at your housing office. More detail will be added as the programme is developed.

Mears have a Customer Care Manager who will promote resident involvement and make sure residents are kept informed of works being undertaken to their homes. This will include meetings and letters before work begins, and visits to residents as appropriate.

Brighton & Hove Standard

The residents' Asset Management Panel also developed the Brighton & Hove Standard, a higher standard than the Decent Homes Standard. For example, it added additional electrical sockets in kitchens where they can be increased without the need for rewiring. The Brighton & Hove Standard will be further developed, consulted upon and agreed with residents as part of the framework for development of local offers.

Energy efficiency

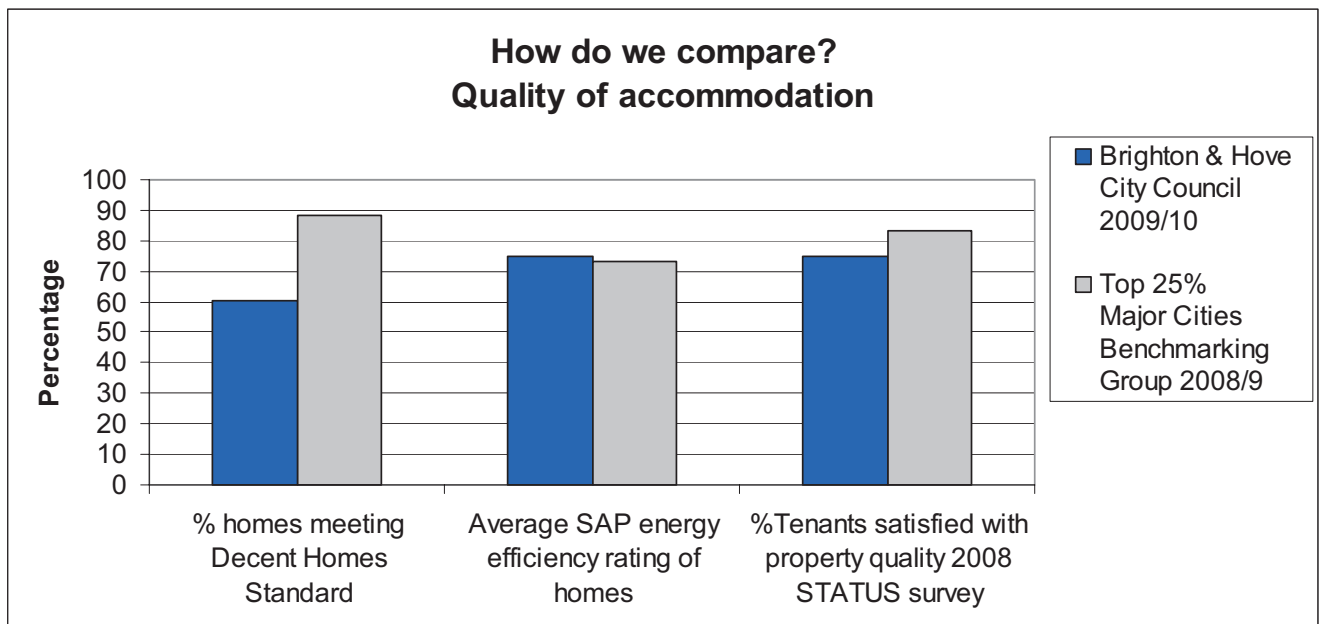
Our investment programme aims to improve the sustainability of our housing wherever possible. During 2009 we provided insulated over cladding on two high rise blocks which will cut tenants' fuel bills and carbon emissions, as well as removing the long-term costs of repairing brickwork. We also installed a communal solar hot water system at a sheltered housing scheme, cutting energy costs. Some of this work was supported through grant funding from energy companies.

The average energy efficiency (SAP) rating of our homes, at 76, is well above the average score for other council landlords, at 64. That saves on residents' fuel bills.

The energy efficiency of our homes is among the best for council landlords.

As part of the Repairs and Improvement Partnership, Mears will produce a Carbon Reduction Plan for the contract. This plan will set out how we will reduce the carbon

impact of the work we do, for example ensuring partnership offices are energy efficient, vans are fuel efficient and that we complete repairs in one visit wherever possible.



“The four tenant board members of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes are working hard to raise money for improvements to council tenants’ homes.”

Trish Barnard, Tenant Board Member

To improve the quality of tenants’ homes, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Bring 74% of tenants’ homes up to Decent Homes Standard, with a £24 million programme of improvements in 2010/11
- Consult with residents on detailed plans for Year 2 of the **three year investment plan**
- Start a review of shared facilities at those sheltered schemes that still have them
- Consult with residents to agree the Brighton & Hove Standard for homes as part of our ‘local offers’
- Investigate ways of improving the energy efficiency of homes, reducing electricity and gas costs for residents and improving the sustainability of the stock.

2. Repairs & maintenance

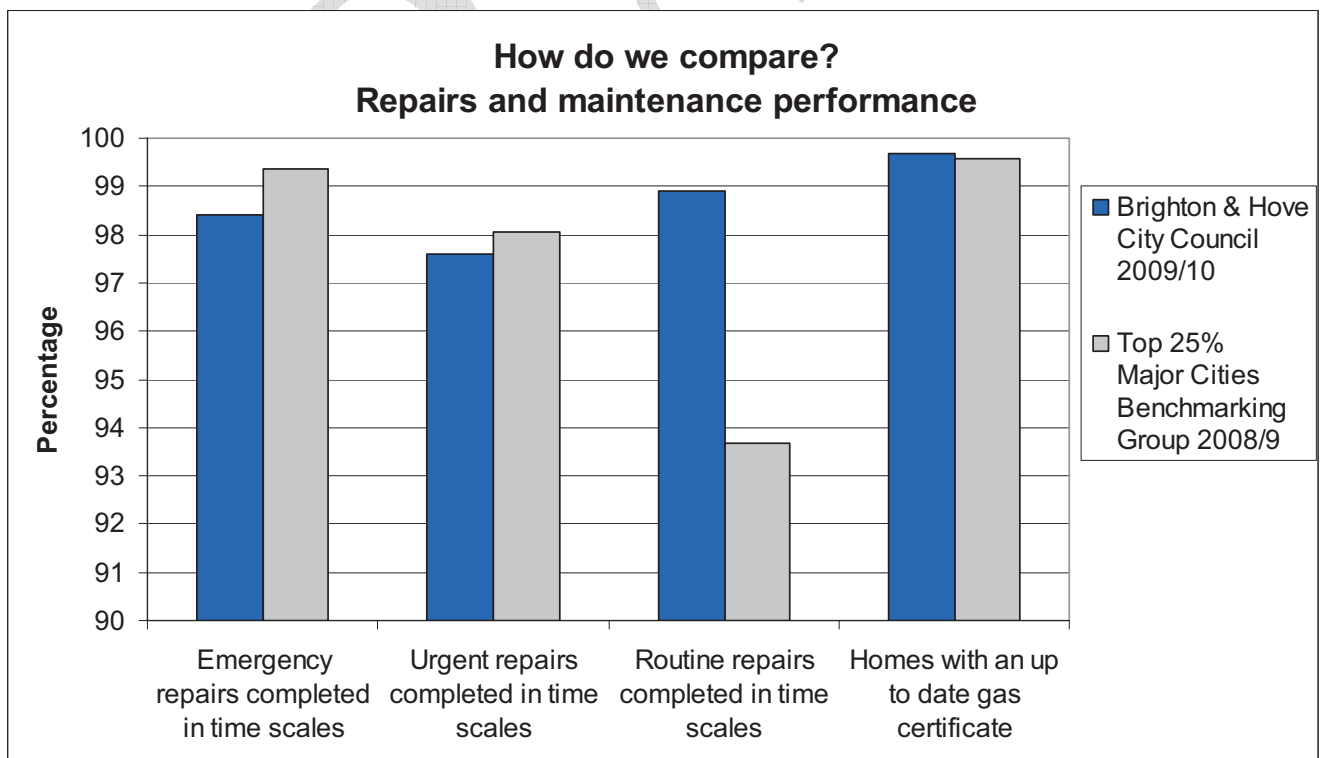
Residents are involved in managing and monitoring the new Repairs and Improvement Partnership which provides improved quality, better customer service and value for money



We made big improvements to repairs and maintenance costs, customer service and performance in 2009/10. The average time to complete routine repairs was cut from 15 days in 2008/9 to 12 days in 2009/10. The number of urgent repairs we had to do has reduced from 29 per cent of repairs in 2007/08 to 14 per cent in 2009/10. We had to do 2,337 fewer emergency repairs in 2009/10 than the year before. In the last two years we have improved our repairs performance from being in the bottom 25% of landlords we compare ourselves against to being in the top 25% in 2009/10.

Repairs performance in 2009/10

- 29,706 repairs completed
- 98.9% Routine repairs completed within our target of 20 working days
- 97.6% Urgent repairs completed within our target of three working days
- 98.4% Emergency repairs completed within our target of 24 hours
- 93% of tenants who completed our satisfaction cards were satisfied with the service
- 98% of those replying to Mears or Kier were satisfied with the repair they had received



'The housing management service has made good progress over the last 18 months. It is working effectively with a clear commitment from all partners to deliver improvement in the repairs and maintenance service for council residents.'

Draft report of the Audit Commission Review of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Contract
July 2010

As well as cost savings, the new Repairs and Improvement Partnership which started on 1 April 2010 aims to give excellent customer service, get repairs 'right first time' and give high levels of customer satisfaction.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Tenants in the TSA focus groups saw repairs as a priority: "Repairs is the main issue". Some were happy with repairs and the quality of work: **"I'm very happy with them. My block is clean and well maintained."**

Most with a complaint about repairs wanted the council to monitor contractors' work and check that it had been done satisfactorily.

The council now has four Clerks of Works to check the quality of works. Mears also check 10% of responsive repairs are completed to the right standard.

'The council has people with the right skills supported by robust structures to deliver and manage the contract. It has created a contract compliance team to monitor the works and ensure repairs are carried out to the specified standards set out in the contract. This team includes a clerk of works whose role is to ensure quality standards.'

Draft report of the Audit Commission Review of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Contract,
July 2010

You can now report repairs 24 hours a day by phone, text, email or on-line. Appointments can also be made straight away with the Repairs Desk at a time that suits you, including evenings and Saturday mornings.

Residents told us the 0800 repairs number which is free from a land line was expensive from a mobile phone. So we now have a local rate 01273 294409 number as well.

We will report the performance of the Repairs Desk regularly to residents and continue 'mystery shopping' exercises by trained resident volunteers to test whether performance is of an excellent standard. Mears also carry out satisfaction surveys with residents after works are completed.

Resident mystery shoppers told us it took too long to get through to the old Repairs Desk in 2009. So the new partnership has made improvements to answer your calls more quickly. The average time taken to answer a call is now less than a minute.

'The council recognises the need to improve feedback arrangements from customer surveys and mystery shopping exercises.'

Draft report of the Audit Commission Review of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Contract,
July 2010

All Property & Investment staff from both Mears and the council will be based in a new housing centre on Moulsecoomb Way so they can work closely together and improve customer service. The centre will also bring wider community benefits such as employment and training opportunities.

Responding to residents' needs

Mears operatives work to a strict Code of Conduct to ensure they provide an excellent level of service. They all have Customer Care and equality and diversity training, for example in disability and mental health awareness. Mears have also developed a range of customer care aids for residents with extra support needs, such as, a Type Talk or Braille guide, a Decent Homes DVD in sign language and subtitles and easy read picture guides. Operatives have Braille identification cards so blind or partially sighted residents can check their identification. Front line staff and operatives can also use Language Line for translation services.

Service standards and local offer

We will work with residents to develop service standards during 2010/11 as we work to agree the repairs and maintenance 'local offer'. The current Tenant Guide to Repairs will be replaced with a new Guide to Repairs developed with residents. The Empty Homes Lettable Standard is also being reviewed this year and will link with the Brighton & Hove Standard for Decent Homes.

The Whitehawk local repairs base, where residents can report repairs directly to Mears operatives has been very successful. Mears are committed to working in partnership with residents in other areas of the city, to tailor services to meet their local priorities.



“The Mears Whitehawk base has improved the estate, we can access repairs more quickly and residents now know who their operatives are.”

Chris El-Shabba, Our neighbourhood local base

The council and Mears have agreed targets to do more planned maintenance, aiming to carry out 60% of works on a planned basis by September 2011. This will reduce the need for emergency and day to day repairs, save money by working in a more efficient way and give a better service to residents.

Resident involvement in monitoring performance

Residents on the Asset Management Panel helped develop performance indicators to measure performance of the new contract. Residents on the Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group are involved in setting and monitoring performance targets for repairs & maintenance and scrutinising the performance of the new partnership through quarterly reports, which also go to the HMCC. Members of both groups sit on the partnership Core Group which has overall responsibility for monitoring the contract.



“The Asset Management Panel worked with the council and Mears to build a relationship that strengthened the repairs contract - including a 24 hour service for tenants.”

Samantha Griffiths, Asset Management Panel



“The Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group helps make sure major works are completed to the best possible standard.”

Brian Balchin, Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group

Adaptations

The council is committed to providing excellent services to people with additional care and support needs, and has budgeted £750,000 a year for aids and adaptations to enable older residents and those with disabilities to stay in their homes. We are training the Neighbourhood Response Team as ‘Trusted Assessors’, meaning they will be able to advise on the available options and fit some adaptations, such as hand rails, without residents having to wait.

We carried out 525 adaptations for disabled or elderly tenants in 2009/10.

We are now working to bring more council homes up to ‘Lifetime Homes’ and wheelchair accessible standards. When we carry out kitchen and bathroom works and work to empty properties, we assess whether the tenant needs any adaptations and whether the home is suitable for adaptation in the future.

The Chairman’s Adaptations Focus Group of residents helped develop a new preventative and streamlined approach to providing housing adaptations for residents with disabilities, which HMCC recommended for approval in December 2009. This is designed to improve customer satisfaction, speed up the process and give us better value for money.

Health & safety

The council has effective processes, monitoring and controls in place to comply with all health and safety requirements for gas, water, electricity, asbestos, fire risk and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.

- 99.68% of homes had up to date gas safety certificates on 31 March 2010
- 34 properties were overdue as tenants would not give us access
- Our target for 2010/11 is 100%

Fire safety works

The council's fire safety and fire risk assessment programme to improve fire safety across our stock involves tailored solutions for the different types of buildings we manage. We have carried out a thorough review of fire safety arrangements in blocks of flats, working closely with the fire service. We have completed all priority work to tower blocks and put improved fire doors in many tower blocks as part of an ongoing city-wide programme. Priority work has also been carried out on other medium-height council blocks.

To improve our repairs and maintenance service to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Agree with residents a 'local offer' service pledge for repairs and maintenance.
- Produce a new Tenant Guide to Repairs with Mears and resident groups.
- Maintain and develop resident involvement at all levels of the repairs partnership.
- Monitor performance and costs to make sure we compare well with other landlords.
- Train the Neighbourhood Response Team to do minor adaptations for tenants with disabilities.

DRAFT

Tenancy

1. Allocations

We allocate housing in a fair, transparent and appropriate way, taking into account the diverse needs of tenants, to contribute to sustainable neighbourhoods and community cohesion

The council and all partner housing associations are part of our 'Homemove' choice based lettings scheme, which has a clear application, decision making and appeals process.



Homemove applications and lettings in 2009/10

Transfer applicants on the housing register	2,241
Other applicants - homeseekers - on the housing register	8,433
Total number of applicants on the housing register	10,674
Transfer applicants joining the housing register in 2009/10	430
Other applicants - homeseekers - joining the register in 2009/10	1,468
Total new applicants joining the housing register in 2009/10	1,898
Lets of council homes to transfer applicants in 2009/10	248
Lets of council homes to other applicants in 2009/10	571
Total lettings of council homes in 2009/10	819

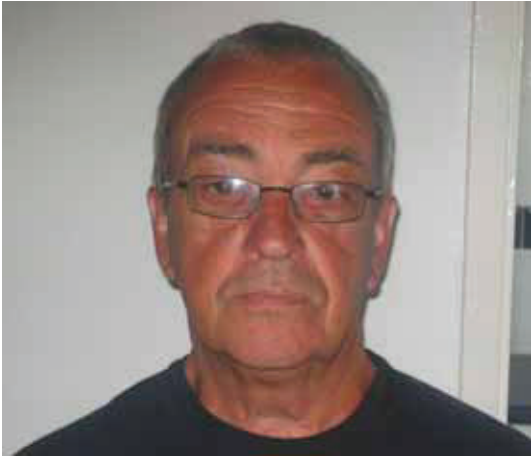
- 30% of council lettings went to transfer applicants in 2009/10
- 21% of people on the housing register were transfer applicants

We offer an 'assisted bid' service to those who need support to manage the system, and provide information to meet the needs of people with a disability, sight or hearing impairment and in other languages. Transfer applicants can receive advice and support to bid for vacancies from any of the five housing offices.

Older people applying for sheltered accommodation now have their support needs assessed by our sheltered co-ordinator, as well as their housing and medical needs. This ensures appropriate housing and support is offered.

We have a register of homes suitable for households with mobility needs, and advertise them accordingly. Applicants are assessed according to their mobility need so we achieve best use of our stock to meet the needs of our applicants.

We brought in local lettings plans to make best use of our stock and to balance communities after wide consultation. For example, giving priority to working families in the most deprived areas of the city, giving priority for sheltered residents to move within and between sheltered schemes and keeping some other blocks just for the over 50s.



“After detailed consultation with Housing Management we were delighted to retain the policy of priority allocation to persons over 50 in our blocks.”

Keith Cohen, Nettleton & Dudeney Residents Association

How we involve tenants and potential tenants in the way we allocate homes

The tenant-led Review of Choice Based Lettings is currently examining the **Allocations policy** and Choice Based Lettings platform, to recommend changes that will ensure a fair and transparent system to allocate the limited available accommodation to those most in need while trying to promote balanced communities and neighbourhoods of choice. The results of the review will go out to full 12 week consultation at the beginning of autumn 2010 when homeseekers, tenants and interested parties in the city will be consulted about any proposed changes.

Residents’ Area Housing Management Panels were closely involved in the previous review of the **Allocations policy** in summer 2009. In addition, 10% of homeseekers and 10% of transfer applicants were invited to give their views on the draft policy.

The Homemove Questionnaire is sent each year to 10% of homeseekers and 10% of transfer applicants asking questions about experience of services. There have been service improvements as a result, for example, a new telephone system to avoid callers receiving an engaged tone when the line was busy.



“Since the Choice Based Lettings Review started things are a lot more positive – communication has greatly improved now that we meet together with officers and can express the tenants’ views and anxieties. Communication has never been better.”

Heather Hayes, Choice Based Lettings Review Group

Tenants complained about incorrect property adverts in the Homemove magazine. So we involved tenants in the drafting of property adverts following a tenant focus group. Now adverts are more accurate and applicants get better information.

Transfer incentive and mutual exchange schemes

Council tenants in Brighton & Hove can get up to £3,500 for downsizing from a family home or wheelchair adapted property they no longer need, or finding their own home in the private sector. Sixty-nine tenants moved through the scheme in 2009/10, including 21 tenants who moved to the private sector. This released 43 three, four and five bedroom properties to let to families in housing need.

Tenants can also move using our mutual exchange scheme.

- 149 tenants moved by doing a mutual exchange in 2009/10

To find out more about the Transfer Incentive and Mutual Exchange schemes, contact your housing office.

When tenants sign up for a tenancy we make an appointment for our eBenefits service to quickly make a Housing Benefit claim and provide financial advice. Early referrals for tenancy support can be made to our Tenancy Sustainment Team. We continue to improve on the time it takes to carry out works to empty council homes and let them to new tenants. In 2009/10, we cut 2½ days off the previous year's figure and beat our target. This is just outside the top 25% of other landlords we compare ourselves against.

- 25½ days – average time to relet an empty home in 2009/10

New tenants told us they wanted more time to move into their new home.

So we now let new tenants pick up the keys on any day of the week before their tenancy starts, making it easier for them to get organised and settle in.

To improve our allocations and lettings service to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Work towards making Homemove a one-stop shop for all housing options, including the private rented sector, in order to offer a greater range of choice.
- Support vulnerable homeseekers by offering them personalised property lists.
- Improve our feedback to applicants with both personalised and general feedback.
- Review how the Local Lettings Plans are working and report to Housing Management Consultative Committee.
- Complete the tenant-led review of the Choice Based Lettings System, including exploring ways to relieve overcrowding. The review group will report back to the Housing Management Consultative Committee.
- Review our lettings processes and information using customer feedback from new tenants.

If you want to move to another council or a housing association home, we advertise properties fortnightly in our free magazine **homemove** - available from council offices and on www.homemove.org.uk

2. Rents

The rents part of the TSA's Tenancy standard does not apply to councils. Our rents are set according to government rules. Information about our performance in collecting rent and dealing with rent arrears is included in the Tenure and Value for Money sections of this report.

3. Tenure

We will continue to work with tenants and leaseholders to provide an effective housing management service and support to fulfil their rights and responsibilities

All new tenants are signed up on Introductory Tenancies.

In 2009/10, we worked with resident representatives to produce a new, clearer **Tenancy Agreement** and a **Tenant Handbook**. We had 2400 responses to the consultation on the draft agreement which included valuable feedback on our services and service improvements. We also produced an easy to read, illustrated tenancy guide to go with the agreement in May 2010.



“Tenants worked closely with council officers to produce a tenancy agreement that clearly sets out the rights and obligations of both parties.”

Barry Hughes, Tenancy Agreement Focus Group

In response to the findings in the mystery shopping exercise in December 2009 we are developing our resource pack to enable all front line staff to provide consistent, accurate information about other council and local services.

‘Staff are aware of the importance of preventative work to reduce evictions – focus on financial inclusion. Evictions have reduced significantly. Good, quick access to money advice. Liaison between the Income Team and Housing Benefit is strong. The introduction of eBenefits has enabled faster Housing Benefit processing. Effective use is being made of discretionary housing payments to reduce any Housing Benefit shortfall for vulnerable tenants.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

The Housing Income Management Team work with tenants to help them avoid getting into debt and to repay arrears if they get into difficulties. They now do a financial health check with new tenants to help maximise income and prioritise bills and use eBenefits to claim Housing Benefit quickly.

We are consulting residents on a draft **financial inclusion strategy**, developed with residents and other stakeholders, which aims to support residents by making sure they have access to appropriate financial products and services. We work to support tenants to keep their tenancy and prevent homelessness.

The Tenancy Sustainment Team works with tenants with complex support needs, co-ordinating services from other services to reduce anti-social behaviour and resolve issues without the need for court action or eviction. The team offers all our tenants support to achieve their potential, whether it is a single intervention or a longer term package of support measures. We concentrate on those most at risk, and help tenants gain skills and employment to help them improve their circumstances.

In 2009/10 we met our targets for helping tenants maintain their tenancy:

- 14 households were evicted for rent arrears, putting us in the best 25% of landlords
- We served 753 Notices of Seeking Possession compared to 917 the year before
- Three tenants were evicted for anti-social behaviour

We carry out a series of home visits to new tenants during the first year of their tenancy to check all is well. We also carry out tenancy visits to around half our tenants each year to check on their needs, pick up any problems with the property or that tenants may have and direct them to support where they need it.

We revised our tenancy checklist in 2009 to place greater emphasis on prevention and detection of tenancy fraud - to make sure our homes continue to be occupied by the tenants we let them to. The visits completed during 2009 showed a low level of sub-letting within our stock – only two led to legal action - but we are participating in an Anti Tenancy Fraud Project to make sure that our homes continue to be occupied by the tenants we let them to.

Turning the Tide

The draft Social Exclusion Strategy "**Turning the Tide**" outlines our response as a landlord to the findings of the **Reducing Inequalities Review** carried out in 2007, which highlighted the levels of multiple deprivation and inequality experienced by residents in social housing in Brighton & Hove. We are currently trying out new approaches and actions to deal with these issues, including an enhanced tenancy check, which will be evaluated and then developed citywide. This will feed into a final draft of the Turning the Tide strategy which will go for consultation in spring 2011.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council makes it clear what is expected with the tenancy. They know how to get support for family and financial problems and where to go for support and guidance:

"From personal experience they will take it seriously."

"They would listen. Good to know there is support."

But some said housing officers can be hard to get hold of.

To improve our tenancy management services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Issue the new **tenant handbook** to all tenants.
- Set up a tenant panel to consult about our tenancy management policies and procedures and publish clear and accessible policies outlining our approach to managing tenancies.
- After consulting with residents, put the finalised financial inclusion strategy into practice.
- Review our processes for new tenants to make sure we know about any support needs before they move in and that all new tenants have a full understanding of their rights and responsibilities.
- Continue our work on identifying and dealing with people fraudulently living in council housing.

If you think someone is unlawfully subletting their council home, please contact your housing office.

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Neighbourhood & Community

1. Neighbourhood management

We aim to make all estates and blocks cleaner, greener and safer places to live to improve the quality of life for all residents

74% of tenants surveyed in 2008 were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live, compared to an average of 75.2% of council tenants nationally.

STATUS survey 2008



The residents' Estates Service Monitoring Group reviewed our Estates Service and worked closely with staff in 2009/10 to improve our cleaning and estates services.

Cleaning

Since April 2009 dedicated cleaners have been based at all high rise buildings, with a small number of mobile cleaning teams travelling to flats in the outer parts of the city. We reviewed service charges when the changes were introduced so the cleaning service now covers its costs. Most cleaners and all Cleaning Managers have qualifications in cleaning (NVQ Level 2 and the British Institute of Cleaning Science Proficiency Certificate). Resident satisfaction with the cleaning of common ways has generally improved.



“The cleaning in our block has really improved after the Estates Service Review.”

Linda King, Estate Services Monitoring Group

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views agreed that the council keeps their block/ estate and communal areas clean and safe or that it partly does so. Comments on cleaning ranged from **“Poor state of cleanliness”** to **“Cleaning has greatly improved since we had our ‘dedicated’ cleaner.”**

Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council is working well trying to keep communal areas clean: **“The council do their best.”**

Neighbourhood Response team

In 2009 the Neighbourhood Response team was re-organised as part of the Estates Service review. This team assess and carry out repairs to common parts and provide a rapid response for vulnerable residents who are locked out or who need small repairs. They also take part in estate inspections, carrying out small landlord repairs such as tightening up common way door closers at the time of the inspection, which is popular with residents.

The Estates Service responded exceptionally well to the snowy weather before and after Christmas, gritting areas, helping vulnerable residents and working with the sheltered service to get groceries for residents.

- Emergency bulk refuse removal – 98.6% removed within our target of 24 hours
- Emergency graffiti removal – 84.3% removed within our target of 24 hours in 2009/10

We work closely with the council’s refuse, recycling and park services in the management of our neighbourhoods and invite them to Area Panel meetings to discuss local issues of concern to residents.

Community Wardens

Community Wardens act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the council, visiting new and vulnerable residents, dealing with low level nuisance and being a visible presence on estates. Since the Community Wardens became part of the local housing teams at the end of 2008 the service has developed considerably, with individual wardens working closely with local residents’ associations and bringing together relevant services to address environmental and low level community safety problems in the neighbourhoods they work in.



Grounds maintenance

The Estates Service Monitoring Group also have a key role in reviewing and monitoring grounds maintenance. Residents have indicated that grounds maintenance is an area of concern in terms of the quality of service provided and value for money so we have launched a project with resident involvement to present a range of options for an improved service. This project includes:

- seeking the views from residents on the service they would like to receive and providing a menu of costed options so they have a real choice.
- reviewing the value for money of the current service, streamlining processes and avoiding duplication.

- supporting more local initiatives to maintain areas of communal space, from looking after flower beds to community allotment schemes.



“The Estates Service Monitoring Group has worked with Housing Management to begin pilot projects that will improve green spaces in Brighton & Hove.”

Rita King, Estates Service Monitoring Group



“After a two hour inspection of our grounds, managers provided an honest and forthright report which will help the grounds maintenance review.”

Valerie Paynter, Clarendon & Ellen Residents Association

We are also improving our estates by taking action against people whose gardens are not of an acceptable standard and recharging tenants the cost of work to put this right.

Estate inspections and ‘Rate your Estate’

Estates are inspected quarterly by local residents, councillors and staff who can pick up any outstanding or unreported works that are needed.

In 2009/10 staff, residents and councillors carried out 420 estate inspections

Join us on our local estate inspections four times a year. You can talk to staff, contractors, tenant representatives and councillors about issues and priorities for your estate or block.



Estate inspection, Wiltshire House

Contact your housing office or see your community notice board to find out when your next estate inspection is due and the results of the last one.

Our Turning the Tide project in Moulsecomb and Bevendean is piloting enhanced estate inspections with a 'Rate Your Estate' initiative where residents are trained to assess and photograph areas of their communities that need improvement.



“I’m very excited about Rate Your Estate - I think it’s a fantastic idea which could transform areas! I hope a lot more residents will get trained and join us!”

Michelle Guyatt, Bevendean Tenants Association

Housing and Estates Forum

A pilot Housing and Estates Forum is being tried out in the Moulsecomb area of the city to ensure that residents' local priorities are being met and to improve the quality of involved in monitoring performance against them. They receive performance indicator information, provide feedback to the council and the partners we work with, and look to increase the level of resident participation in the delivery of housing services. This group has started to go with housing staff on communal inspections highlighting repair priorities and estate improvements.

Fire Safety

East Sussex Fire & Rescue are working closely with us to improve fire safety across all the council's housing stock and fire officers came to all Area Panels to advise on arrangements to keep residents safe. As a result, we have introduced a clean, clear and safe approach to items left in common ways which could pose a risk to residents and fire fighters if there were a fire.

We are making sure residents know what to do in the event of a fire with more signs and publicity on fire safety for all residents. And personal emergency evacuation plans are being put in place for the most vulnerable residents.

Fire safety in sheltered schemes

In 2009 we made sure all sheltered schemes had a publicly displayed 'delayed evacuation plan' and put up fire assembly points so schemes could be evacuated smoothly. All tenants who use oxygen cylinders have received a sticker for their front door so the fire brigade are aware in an emergency.

All sheltered residents have an annual fire safety talk, attended by East Sussex Fire & Rescue where possible, and an annual written reminder on fire safety practices. All scheme managers have received fire safety training and in July 2010 all sheltered tenant representatives have been invited to a fire briefing in preparation for the introduction of fire drills in the service.

We also reviewed our procedures for supporting our most vulnerable residents in the event of emergencies such as lift breakdown. We now have a record of which residents to contact as a priority in an emergency.

We are developing a mobility scooter strategy as we have many older or less agile residents and need to find safe ways to store these scooters.

The Estates Service is a member of Housemark's Estates Service Club and is joining in their new benchmarking exercise to compare our performance and costs in cleaning and grounds maintenance with other landlords. In May we carried out a peer review with Crawley Borough Council to check out each other's service.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views agreed that the council works in partnership with residents and other organisations to maintain and improve their neighbourhood or that it partly does so. Comments ranged from: **“Only when it suits the council”** to **“Excellent assistance offered.”**

To improve our neighbourhood management services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Develop a policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with residents' homes, working with the Estates Service Monitoring Group. This will include how we will work with residents to deal for example, with vandalism and graffiti.
- Develop and agree with residents service pledges on the estates service and tenancy management, including grounds maintenance, as part of 'local offers'.
- Carry out resident satisfaction surveys for key estates identified by Estate Services Monitoring Group and test customer satisfaction with our cleaning and other estate services and their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- Encourage more residents to get involved in estate inspections, particularly those who said they were interested in them in the Tenant and Leaseholder Involvement Questionnaire.
- Evaluate the Rate your Estate and Housing and Estates Forum initiatives in the 'Turning the Tide' pilot in Moulsecomb and Bevendean and, if residents agree they are successful, introduce them across the other areas of the city.
- Develop comprehensive emergency response procedures for in and out of office hours – response to gas leaks, electricity supply failure, lift breakdown, severe weather, etc.
- Continue to implement improvements to fire safety and introduce fire drills in sheltered schemes.
- Work with the Estates Service Monitoring Group and local residents in one area of the city to work towards achieving the Keep Britain Tidy Kitemark.
- Complete the review of mobility scooter policy and storage.

2. Local Area Co-operation

We will work together with residents and other organisations to help make your neighbourhood a better place to live

The role we play in making safe and empowering communities of opportunity is set out in our **Housing Strategy 2009-2014: Healthy Homes, Healthy Lives, Healthy City**. Tenants were very involved through consultation on this strategy in setting the direction of the whole city's housing services. So, too, were community and voluntary sector groups and housing association representatives.

We work closely with partners to ensure we provide an excellent tenancy management service including:

- working with residents and the Community Payback Team to develop a programme to benefit residents citywide
- acting as lead partners in community clear up days.
- working with residents and partners to set up neighbourhood agreements, such as the Bristol Estate Neighbourhood Action Plan and Community Safety Project.

“The organic allotment has brought the community together and let them learn and have fun at the same time.”

Maggie Smeeth, Twineham Close Garden Project (see photo on front cover)



“Working with the payback team has greatly improved the appearance of the Bristol Estate. Serendipity community development organisation have also helped create a better atmosphere on the estate and brought people together.”

Ray Freeman, Bristol Estate Community Association

An elected tenant representative sits on the city's Community Safety Forum that we work with in dealing with anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where our residents live.



“The Community Safety Forum allows residents to raise their concerns about vital safety issues, including hate crime.”

John Stevens, Community Safety Forum

Our sheltered services work in close partnership with a wide range of supportive organisations to provide care, support and social activities for our older residents, such as:

- health and social care, who run stop smoking clinics and a falls prevention surgery at our sheltered schemes
- Age Concern, who run a range of social activities in eleven schemes, including nintendo wii sessions. Nearly 100 residents have joined in.
- Creating Timelines has run a programme of reminiscence events in schemes.
- Grey Matters runs an older people's radio's service from one of the council's sheltered schemes.
- in 2010 in partnership with Leach Court tenants, the council was awarded £4,000 from the Get Digital campaign for a media and activity centre in the scheme.

Around £48,000 of voluntary staff hours are thought to have been invested in the council's sheltered schemes over the last two years.

Sheltered services work closely with residents and local community groups to ensure that, where possible, schemes benefit older people living nearby. The Warm-welcome Club in Whitehawk, the Forget-me-not Club in Hangleton and a tenant run lunch club in Sanders House all help tackle social isolation in the community.



“We’re working together with officers to cut down energy use and carbon emissions – this will save residents money and improve their health.”

Beverley Weaver,
Energy Efficiency Working Group

The Cabinet Member for Housing's Energy Efficiency Working Group of residents, staff and councillors was set up in 2009 after concerns and meetings about increased fuel bills – particularly for tenants living in high-rise blocks of flats. It is now looking at how to reduce all residents' fuel bills and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by reducing energy use in council owned homes and at cutting water bills. It is getting training from the Energy Saving Trust for tenant 'energy champions', to give energy advice on simple actions around the home that everyone can make to reduce fuel bills.

The group is also looking to support sustainable communities by encouraging residents to grow food and other activities with their neighbours on local housing land. It is also looking at possible funding for 'retro-fitting' our homes to make them more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to run and keep warm.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who responded thought the council could do more to co-operate with other organisations to promote social, environmental and economic well-being, though some were not clear what this standard really meant. One representative suggested we:

“Inform [resident or tenant associations] who the other organisations [are] within the community to help support and also so local volunteers are able to work and communicate with these organisations.”

To improve our services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Let you know how we co-operate and work with relevant partners to help provide social, environmental and economic well being in your area
- Ensure we work effectively and co-operatively with other agencies.

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3. Anti-social behaviour

Acts of nuisance, tenancy breach and anti-social behaviour will not be tolerated – they will be challenged and actions taken

We use a full range of tools to combat anti-social behaviour (ASB) – including Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, mediation, injunctions, Noise Abatement Notices, demoted tenancies and possession action - and our housing management standards reflect the government's Respect Standard. We have close effective working arrangements with police and other agencies and are active partners in Local Action Teams, Joint Action Groups, drugs intelligence partnerships and local crime prevention initiatives.

In addition:

- Our new **tenancy agreement** and **handbook** set clear behaviour standards. The residents' focus group made sure it included clauses on nuisance issues that tenants are concerned about, including noisy laminate flooring and pets.
- Our approach is robust and assertive actions to address ASB.
- Our approach is early intervention and staff emphasise what is expected of tenants at new tenancy visits.
- We have links to specialist hate crime support caseworkers including for racial and homophobic harassment.
- We are piloting an innovative new approach, linking social and financial inclusion, support and enforcement in a holistic prevention and response to ASB.
- We use an independent mediation service which has proved very effective.
- We use diversionary activities to provide young people with activities on estates, such as Kickz (football) and Green Fingers gardening club in Whitehawk.
- We tell residents about ASB news through our resident newsletter, Homing In. This highlights our efforts to tackle ASB and informs residents about how to report ASB and how they can help us.

Complaints of ASB are firstly made to housing offices, who deal with most cases. The Antisocial Behaviour Team deals with the most serious cases of ASB. In 2009/10 the team successfully obtained a 'premises closure order', working with Sussex Police to use new legal powers to shut a property down in an extreme case of all-night parties, verbal abuse and intimidation.

We also took injunctions against two people who were causing severe problems. When the injunctions were broken they were sent to prison.

In four very serious cases, the team got possession orders - one tenant stopped the ASB and the other three were evicted.

Anti-social behaviour case study

A tenant in a block of flats was causing tremendous nuisance by playing loud music at all times including during the night and early morning.

Neighbours suffered great disturbance and couldn't get away from the noise in their own homes. They were often not able to sleep and were woken up during the night.

We worked very closely with Environmental Health and the police. The tenant had his

noise making equipment seized and the council obtained an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) to stop him from making more noise.

However, he continued to cause nuisance and breached the ASBO. He was therefore arrested in early January, convicted and sentenced to 16 months in prison. In the meantime we got full possession of his flat and evicted him.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views generally agreed that it is easy to report anti-social behaviour (ASB) to the council. We had some positive feedback:

“Yes I am pleased with the way that we can report anti social behaviour and the way officers can support tenant”

“The help and support that I am receiving from my Anti Social Behaviour Housing Officer is improving my life.”

But several residents felt the council could do more to make tenants aware of their responsibilities and rights on ASB and to offer support to victims of ASB and witnesses.

Suggestions included:

“Listen and act. Do not just collect a paper trail.”

“Needs follow up once anti-social behaviour has initially been dealt with.”

Tenants in the TSA focus groups thought the council does not have a strong emphasis on preventative measures for ASB and it isn't always given the immediate attention it deserves. They felt the council is expecting tenants affected by ASB to police it themselves by having to fill in a diary. Many don't bother to complain. The perception is that the council takes a long time to sort out ASB. Many realised that this is often down to legal procedures of collecting evidence and not always the council's fault, but still it is frustrating: **“It's a long drawn out process if you are living in fear and despair.”**

Since October 2009 the Antisocial Behaviour Team has been operating city wide under the Turning the Tide project. This is to ensure that all of the city's tenants can benefit from the refocused approach to ASB.

The Turning the Tide project has

- Increased the focus on robust management of anti-social behaviour and earlier interventions.
- Improved the way we manage cases.
- Extended and embedded joint working with partner agencies.
- Expanded the ASB recording system to allow for more detailing reporting.

We measure our performance on ASB against service standards. We record all ASB complaints and responses and analyse them to identify patterns which are used for service planning. We also record customer satisfaction with ASB case handling and outcomes.

In January to March 2010, 69.5% of tenants affected by ASB dealt with by the Antisocial Behaviour Team were satisfied or very satisfied (48.5%) with how the team handled the problem and the final outcome.



“The Leaseholders Action Group made dealing with neighbourhood nuisance, which can also be caused by tenants of leaseholders, a priority and worked with the council to produce new information keeping everyone better informed.”

Linda Shaw, Leaseholders Action Group

To improve our services to you on anti-social behaviour, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Work with the new residents' Anti-social Behaviour Focus Group to improve the way we deal with anti-social behaviour.
- Implement the national standards for dealing with anti-social behaviour.
- Introduce improved service standards for victims and witnesses of ASB as part of a 'local offer' service pledge for anti-social behaviour to be agreed with residents and in place by 1 April 2011. These will ensure that we will provide a more intensive level of service for residents who are most vulnerable and at risk.

Contact your housing office if you have any concerns about anti-social behaviour.

Value for Money

We will continue to involve residents in working to ensure that the services we provide meet your priorities, are high quality and at the right cost

Making better use of public money is one of the council's priorities and we aim to reduce our costs while also improving our services to you. We have already made significant progress to help bring down our costs, while continuing to improve our performance and services to residents. We have been redirecting resources to meet residents' priorities, particularly improvements to tenants' homes and our estates.

In the 2008 Status survey, tenants told us that value for money for your rent is one of the three most important issues for you. So we are taking action to provide you with better services and homes while trimming our costs.

Some of the ways we have improved value for money include:

- making efficiency savings across all our budgets
- £2 million savings from the two year entrance door programme
- reducing current tenant arrears significantly in the last five years
- increasing income by reducing the time it takes to repair and re-let empty properties
- offering cheaper contents insurance to tenants and leaseholders
- recharging more tenants for deliberate damage or neglect and improving collection rates on these debts
- freeing up Housing Officers to spend more time out visiting tenants and properties.

Residents told us we should be more flexible with outgoing tenants who often had to throw away good carpets and fittings new tenants might want.

So now when we visit the outgoing tenant we agree with them what they can leave behind – meaning less waste and better value for money.

Costs of managing your home

We reduced the cost of managing tenants' homes from £18.58 per property per week in 2005/6 to £17.11 in 2008/9 and £17.03 in 2009/10. We aim to further reduce our costs so that we compare better with the best landlords.

'The council is improving value for money. Housing management costs have reduced to average when compared to other councils.'

Draft report of the Audit Commission Review of the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Contract,
July 2010

Costs of repairs and improvements

Improving the way the council buys repairs and maintenance services helped to reduce maintenance costs for tenants' homes from £18.82 per property per week in 2006/7 to £18.50 in 2008/9. In 2009/10 we carried out more works to tenants' homes and spent £20.02 per rented property per week. These are our costs on responsive (day-to-day) repairs, empty properties, gas servicing and other service contracts, such as for lift maintenance.

The new partnership with Mears will provide even greater savings as well as improving the quality of works and bringing wider community benefits such as apprenticeships. These savings, along with some borrowing plus funding from the Local Delivery Vehicle, will enable all tenants' homes to be brought up to Decent Homes Standard by the end of 2013.

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Most residents who gave us their views said the council partly meets the standard of providing cost effective, efficient, quality services and homes to meet tenants' needs. Comments included:

“Cost effective – yes; efficient – yes; quality services – no.”

“The rent is value for money. Limited services are offered.”

“They should not just tell us about things they have done but also what they are going to do. Let us know how much things are going to cost.”

Involving you in ensuring value for money

We will continue to keep residents informed of our work to reduce costs and improve services through Homing In and regular updates to HMCC and other resident meetings.

Residents have been consulted on our 30 year business plan and budget strategy and are involved in setting the revenue and capital budgets. For example:

- residents decide how to spend the Estate Development Budget each year, to meet their local priorities
- the annual budget is discussed with resident representatives at HMCC
- residents helped to develop the £76 million three year capital programme.

Benchmarking

We compare our performance against other landlords through a 'benchmarking' organisation for landlords called Housemark and using information published by central government and government agencies.

We compare ourselves against similar landlords and the best performing ones to provide us with a robust comparison and the opportunity to explore where improvements can be made. We produce benchmarking reports on tenant satisfaction, our performance and now on costs, as recommended by the Audit Commission.

Resident representatives at HMCC see our performance reports every three months, which include comparisons with the top performing landlords.

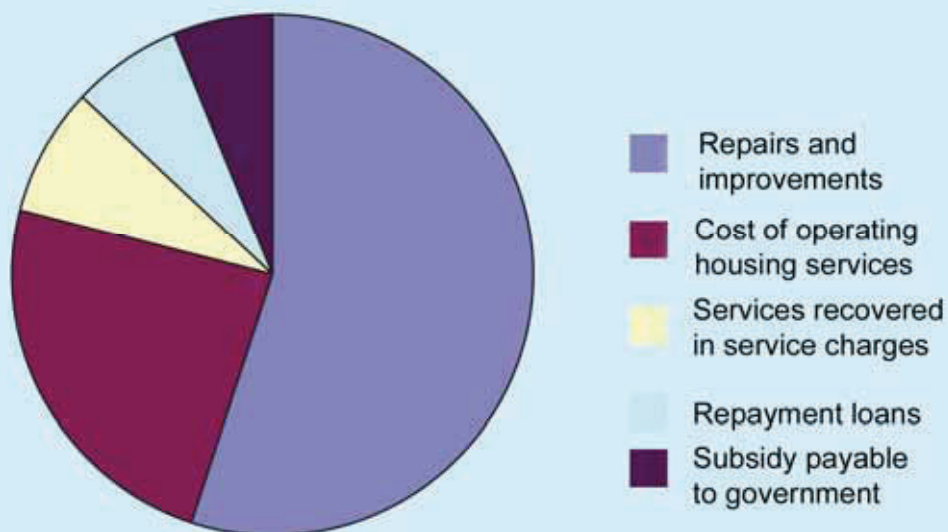
‘The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan reflects the principles of effective service planning and the full range of housing management challenges faced by the council. Understanding of costs and use of benchmarking is an area for development.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

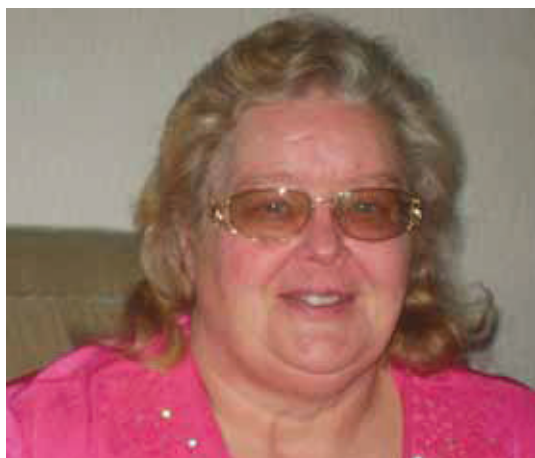
Rents

In 2009/10 the average rent was £65.72 per week and the pie chart below shows how we spent it.

How we spent tenants' rents and service charges in 2009/10



We have reduced the time taken to set up rent accounts and process Housing Benefit applications leading to improved satisfaction with the service. In 2009/10 we collected 98.29% of rent due from tenants and improved performance on collecting former tenancy arrears.



“Rent collection is still going up so there’s more to spend on services.”

Tina Urquhart, Housing Income Management Monitoring Group

‘Staff are provided with clear procedures and policies in relation to rent collection and recovery. A broad range of initiatives are used to promote a rent payment culture (e.g. signs on vans). The introduction of eBenefits has enabled faster Housing Benefit processing. Service charges are disaggregated and are shown clearly on rent increase letters. Former tenants’ arrears are being actively managed - use made of prompt tracing.’

Audit Commission advice & assistance visit March 2009

In 2009 we consulted with the Leaseholders Action Group Committee on a new major works leaflet with comprehensive payment advice and information for leaseholders when consulted or billed for works of £250 or more. This was agreed and is now being used to inform leaseholders of all aspects of major works, the costs and the help with payment that may be available.

In 2009/10 we achieved our highest ever collection rate of leaseholder service charges.

Service charges

Residents have helped us to increase value for money, improve services and reduce service charges. Some examples include:

- resident led reviews of the Estates Service
- cheaper alarms
- achieving £100,000 annual savings from a new electricity contract which will be passed onto residents in reduced service charges
- saving £25,000 a year through the resident-led new laundry contract.



“The brand new laundry contract will definitely save money and we will no longer have to subsidise the service.”

Faith Matyszak MBE, Laundry Facilities Group

What did tenants and leaseholders say?

Residents who gave us their views were divided on whether the council provides value for money for their rent and service charge. All tenants in the TSA focus groups were happy with the rent they pay but none felt involved in the spending on services. Some thought this would be a huge task to try to involve tenants. When they were asked whether they would be willing to pay extra for better quality services there was a strong reaction against the idea.



“The LDV aims to give the council best value for money for properties in need of refurbishment.”

Roy Crowhurst, Tenant Board Member,
Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes

Making best use of our housing and land assets

We are looking at opportunities for building new council homes on housing land that we own to make best use of our assets and meet the high demand for more homes. Residents from the Repairs & Maintenance Monitoring Group and Asset Management Panel will be working with us on this project.

To improve the value for money of our services to you, by 31 March 2011 we will:

- Introduce more efficient and effective ways of running services.
- Get better value for money in repairs and works to empty homes.
- Develop our benchmarking and provide more benchmarking information to residents so you can compare our performance and costs to other landlords.
- Review with residents the format for reports and include costs of our services so residents can:
 - develop a detailed understanding of the costs of our services
 - challenge how our costs compare to other landlords
 - see how we have prioritised expenditure
 - see how we have secured and tested value for money
- Through the published three year programme of capital works, give leaseholders access to more current and accurate information on planned works to buildings, some of which may give rise to leaseholder service charges.

Our housing offices

Open Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm (reception closes at 4.30pm on a Friday)

- **Lavender Street Housing Office** 01273 293260
email: LavenderStreetOffice@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- **Manor Place Housing Office** 01273 293200
email: ManorPlaceOffice@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- **Oxford Street Housing Office** 01273 293230
email: OxfordStreetOffice@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- **Selsfield Drive Housing Office** 01273 293171
email: SelsfieldDriveOffice@brighton-hove.gov.uk
- **Victoria Road Housing Office** 01273 293377
email: VictoriaRoadOffice@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Translation? Tick this box and take to any council office.	
ترجمة؟ ضع علامة في المربع وخذها إلى مكتب البلدية.	Arabic <input type="checkbox"/>
অনুবাদ? বক্সে টিক চিহ্ন দিয়ে কাউন্সিল অফিসে নিয়ে যান।	Bengali <input type="checkbox"/>
需要翻譯? 請在這方格內加別, 並送回任何市議會的辦事處。	Cantonese <input type="checkbox"/>
ترجمه؟ لطفا این مربع را علامتگذاری نموده و آن را به هر یک از دفاتر شهرداری ارائه نمایید.	Farsi <input type="checkbox"/>
Traduction? Veuillez cocher la case et apporter au council.	French <input type="checkbox"/>
需要翻譯? 請在這方格內划勾, 并送回任何市议会的办事处。	Mandarin <input type="checkbox"/>
Tłumaczenie? Zaznacz to okienko i zwróć do któregoś z biura samorządu lokalnego (council office).	Polish <input type="checkbox"/>
Tradução? Coloque um visto na quadrícula e leve a uma qualquer repartição de poder local (council office).	Portuguese <input type="checkbox"/>
Tercümesi için kareyi işaretleyiniz ve bir semt belediye burosuna veriniz	Turkish <input type="checkbox"/>
	other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>
This can also be made available in large print, Braille, or on CD or audio tape	

Housing Management
Brighton & Hove City Council
Kings House, Grand Avenue, Hove BN3 2SR

If you would like any more information or documents mentioned in this report please look on our website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/council-housing or contact your housing office or council.housing@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Please let us know what you think of this annual report and what you would like in a future year's report. Send your comments to Carol Jenkins, Housing Stock Review Manager, Room 235, Kings House, Grand Avenue, Hove BN3 2SR or email carol.jenkins@brighton-hove.gov.uk



